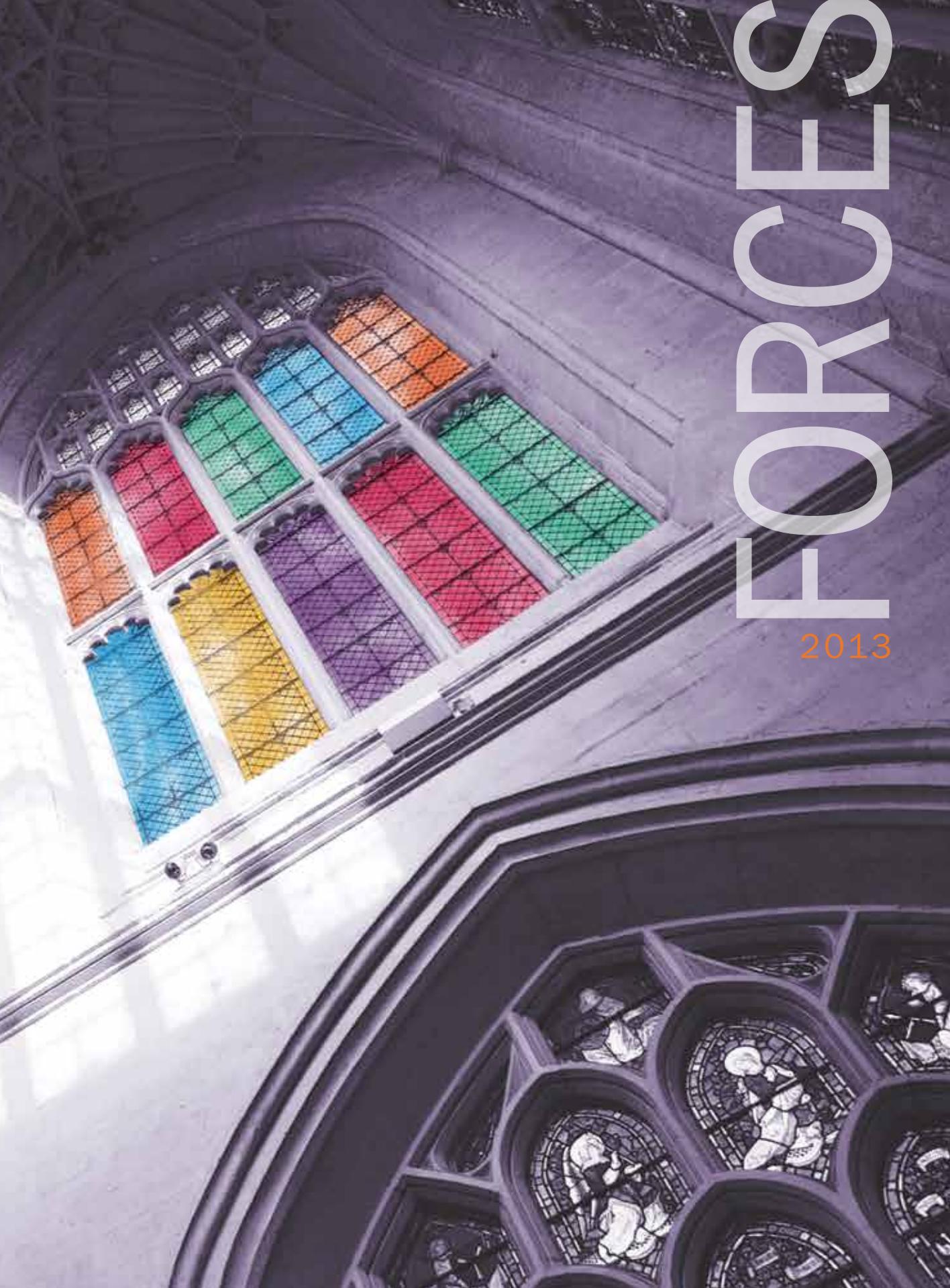


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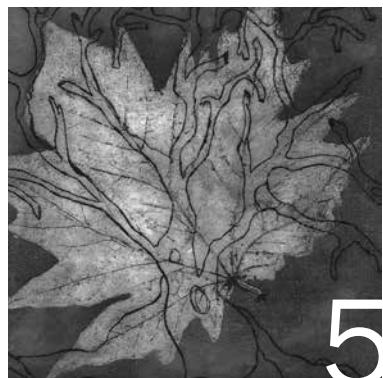




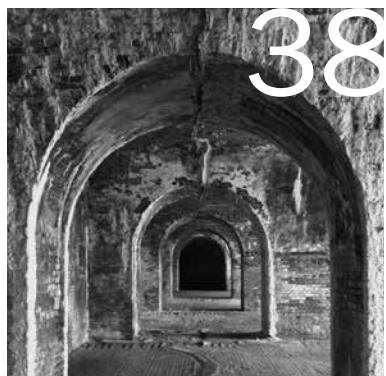
I suppose all writing is about that moment of our journey where we are challenged to find our way past an obstacle; a sudden challenge that gives us reason to search our infant gills for more oxygen, the feeling of being “it” in a game of tag on the playground between the see-saw and slide of our youth. The following works give a picture of us jumping over, burrowing under, sliding beside, cutting through, and even sitting contemplatively on top of the problem. I am reminded of watching my dog Spot when I was young chasing our Siamese cat, Happy, and I wondered what he would do if he caught her? He finally did and having achieved his goal, he had not thought beyond it; in his ignorance, he simply sat on top of the cat for a bit, then let her go. Join this collective/individual journey of artists jumping bravely across the synaptic gap of creative blocks and challenges to help question what it is to be brave enough to face being human, or what a cuckoo does inside the cuckoo clock when he’s not working, or why chasing the proverbial cat is sometimes more rewarding than catching it.

R. Scott Yarbrough
Editor of *Forces* Literary Journal

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in bold and positive directions.



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**BLEAK TREE** AVA EVERETT**A New Leaf**

PHILIP FULLMAN

This poem and I
are breaking up

Things were great
in the beginning

We met
while I was watching
my neighbor
do yard work

I thought
about her
She'd talk to me
Share
what she was thinking

Go ahead, mention the leaf blower

But since I made
a commitment
Decided to put her
on paper
she's quit talking
Quit putting out

We've grown apart
It's time for me
to start writing
other poems

**FLOATING LEAF** AVA EVERETT



REFLECTION JULIE COVINGTON

All the Pretty Girls

LINDSAY C. GRASSMAN

All the pretty girls should smile,
 For happy should they be,
 With thankfulness, though jilted still,
 That they are not ugly,
 For to be pretty, certainly,
 Is all that one can want,
 For that is all a man will weigh,
 And thus, all girls can flaunt.
 They do not want your witty words,
 Or wisdom in your heart,
 So smile, all you pretty girls,
 And make deceit your art;
 A smile here and blushing there,
 Will ready hide the pain,
 Of never knowing day to day,
 If he will come again,
 For men are like the earthy dust,
 That gathers on the floor,
 Then blows away and makes no mind,
 To return ever more.
 They make you feel significant,
 But this is all through guile,
 For they will take the road again,
 So smile, ladies, smile!

**SUMMER LOVE** DEVIN GALLEGOS

FORCES 2013



VEILED JANANI JEGANATHAN

For Paige

LINDSAY C. GRASSMAN

I remember back when you were the sunshine
Your lust an innocent, almost unchained force
Your beauty, a flower in danger of spotting
Your words all folly, but flippant at best
The dead men all like dolls behind a glass,
Their painted faces a distant row of idols,
Their altar untouched by your white sacrifices,
Their nostrils clean of your smoke, because
You weren't on fire yet.

I disappeared for a while and lost sight of you
But when lightning strikes, it can be heard for miles
And I heard the rumble of your tears on the roof
A bullet spill of liquid destruction
Your flower wilted, weathered, worn
Your follies, pockmarks on your skin
Your vibrancy unleashed, your light dimmed
And I could smell the smoke as it drifted through the ethers
Because you had already burnt.

You're quiet now
No more words to speak or describe
No love in your kisses, no light in your smiles
Only a bright veneer, cold and empty
A hollow, painted eggshell with no spirit
No more banter
No more mirth
Only silence
For all that's left are ashes.



DEATH DO US PART AYESHA IFTIKHAR

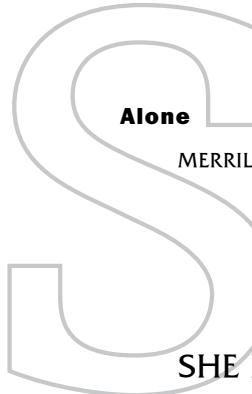
I Can't Move

DRANE

Can a family be blessed and cursed
At the same time
I did everything I could
To keep from crying
My dear grandmother is asking:
“Why”
Wondering why she is still here
Without siblings and peers

The old days are long gone
While the things that use to matter
Do not matter anymore
And all that is left
Is tucked away in a small room
Where promises of visits
Never come true
O’ Lord
What am I to do
For she is standing at the door

Wanting to go
And I can’t move
I can’t move
I can’t move
O’ Lord
She is standing at the door
Wanting to go
And I can’t move
I can’t move
I can’t move



SHE DIED ON A WEDNESDAY NIGHT, without us.

Wintertime in Dallas wasn't the only reason that night would be frozen in my memory.

Earlier that evening, my husband, two children and I visited my mother's hospital room with cake and candles in tow. A store bought cake was usually out of the question, but being hospitalized kept my mom from baking my annual birthday cake. When we entered her quiet, dim room, I announced, "Happy birthday to me." She tried to speak but was only able to mumble through her oxygen mask. The respirator fed her lungs pure oxygen to keep her body alive. The severe pneumonia was quickly overtaking my mother's body. The hospital staff was doing everything they could, which wasn't much—that's the way she wanted it.

We ate cake, she couldn't. We all loved on her the best we could in spite of all the beeping machines, wires, and tubes entering various points in her body. We didn't stay long. Even though she was bedridden, we all attempted to hug her goodbye. We just didn't know that this would be our last embrace.

Later that night at 11:30 p.m., my whole family and I were asleep at home. In the morning, my ringing telephone in the kitchen jolted me out of bed. On the other end of the line was a nurse who told me that several hospital staff had recorded numerous messages on my cell phone. I had accidentally left it in my car. The hospital had been trying to reach me all night. By the time I found out my mother had died, she'd been gone seven hours.

Through the waves of shock, my husband's loving arms were barely noticeable. Emotionally distraught, I felt useless to anyone. My muscles didn't work, and my mind was lost in a maze of disbelief. Time itself was meaningless through the darkness of that cold February morning. I don't even remember the sun coming up.

The fact that my mother died on my 40th birthday didn't even register. The immense impact of that cruel act of fate wouldn't affect me until much later.

After I got the hospital's message, I called my Aunt at 6:30 a.m. I stood in my bedroom with the phone to my ear listening to her cry for the loss of her only sister. My frozen tongue and paralyzed face gave no relief to her wails.

After I told her that mom had passed the previous night, and that I had just received the hospital's message, she asked the worst question I've ever been asked.

"So, was she alone?"

An incredible shot of guilt stabbed through my body. The job of caring for my mother was mine alone. I was the only family member in close enough proximity to be there physically, day or night. And, I wasn't there. I had missed her passing. I had failed. I wasn't by her side when she died.

I didn't really know if she was alone or not. I think the nurse had said something to the fact that my mother had struggled for a while and then just slipped away. The nurse's account led me to believe that someone was with her, but I wasn't sure.

My Aunt sounded slightly relieved by my recollection of the conversation, but I wasn't. Aching in my mind was the unanswered question, "Was she alone?"

The pain from the slight possibility that the answer was "yes," kept me from asking the hospital staff when I arrived later that day. I definitely had a conversation with a nurse about the events of the previous night, but merely danced around the question. I didn't have the guts to ask point blank. I failed again.

Many regrets can be resolved, but I'm not sure that being absent from a parent's death is one of them. Is it ok that I wasn't there when she died, or not?

I have always had conversations with people in my head. Sometimes I'm right about what they would say, sometimes I'm wrong. I believe I knew my mother better than anyone. Over the past 4 years since her death, I have spoken to her in my mind so many times—in thousands of conversations. And, you know what? Every time I have brought up these failures, every time I have apologized to her spirit for not being there when she died, I believe she has whispered to me, "It's ok honey. I love you."

So this morning, once again, apologies have been accepted. Now I just have to learn how to forgive myself.

The Road Less Graveled

D. KNAPE

I'll bet you money
The road less traveled
Is just a lane
That's dirt and gravel

Stick to the paved road
The decision you're makin'
Will get you home quicker
Than the road not taken.

There's Nothing to Say

KAIYLYN COX



WHAT A HARD TIME IT IS to be a fifth grader, I thought as I walked to the gold van that always held my mom in the driver's seat, waiting for us to climb in and tell her about our day. Natalie always sat in the seat behind my mom, and me in the opposite seat. I was finally big enough to avoid the always dreaded little kid car seat.

My mom was late that day, like most days. Only, this time, there was a reason.

One week ago we were there. How could so much change in one week? I wasn't going to show any emotion. What was my little sister going to think? My mom would think I was a baby. Only babies cry. I resorted to my bright green jacket that I wore every day. I buried my face into my trusty jacket until the five minute ride was over.

The next day we started the drive to Oklahoma. As a kid it always seemed like we were driving to some far off place. I repeatedly asked my parents, "Are we there yet?" The day was grey, cloudy, and cold.

As I walked into the cold morning of September 17, I had no idea what would happen. I didn't know most people in attendance. Everything seemed to drag on. Emotions were high as the day continued. Soon we would walk through some green grass, careful not to step on the rocks. My mom said it was disrespectful to step on them. As we stood there, I watched as little pink flower petals were tossed down gently.

"Why isn't she coming out of that box?" My seven year old sister asked. I had no idea what to say. There is nothing to say to a seven year old who can't grasp the idea of death. Instead I stood there and cried, allowing myself not to cover my face with my green jacket.

Boxes are made to hold almost everything. They can hold mementos of the past. They can hold pictures. They can hold important things. They aren't supposed to hold you.

NEMO JESUNESAN JANANI JEGANATHAN



Swallowtail

BONNIE FRAZIER

I keep apologizing to God
for the mistake I am
in my mother's image
found a swallowtail
a tear in its wing
would have been merciful to kill it
I couldn't
I held it in the palm of my hand
in my car, sweating within the metal
underneath the Texas sun
and watched it die



Pasadena

BONNIE FRAZIER

I remember Pasadena
a lunch prepared
Mike and I ate
he inquired of my future plans
for when I grew up
we consumed sandwiches and soup
well-crafted by you
I wanted more but did not ask
fondness lingered between us
but not the intimacy customary on my mother's side
the kind that would have allowed me to share
that I ate like a goat
or to divulge the reason for my visitation
a temporary escape from
a woman lost in a bottle of vodka, a mind fractured
her parents considered snatching me from her
alas, age got the best of them
one more daughter, too much for old folks
so I sat and waited
but by the time you came
already lost my mind
tumors spreading to metastasis
enough destruction to send myself to oblivion
would my life have changed, if you had seen me
hiding underneath the bed?



SADNESS - SAD TIMES JULIE COVINGTON

Softly

BONNIE FRAZIER

My mother bought me a Giacometti
book, coffee table size
for my 18th birthday
seventy dollars at the time
inscribed to me, love mom

Softly, the chair arm repeatedly hitting the desk
a muffled sound of plush pleather against hard wood
the rhythm, the background noise
of me sifting through my memories

At twenty six, I sold that book to a
second hand bookstore in Chicago
ten dollars received to
feed my habit of
China white from the West Side

Softly, the sound of my heart, aged
watching through the window
trees waving to me
the rhythm, the background noise
of me sifting through my memories

My mother pushed me into the tub, and
washed the stink off me
from withdrawal, the two of us
overwhelmed by her illness
our dynamic inverted
I should have been the one
to carry her though

Softly, the salt wanders
down my face, to the
frame of the bed, one with a
bone weakened sound
the rhythm, the background noise
of me sifting through my memories.

A Trip to Blockbuster**Turns Into a Poem**

PHILIP FULLMAN

I wish I was creative.
 Like I was as a kid.
 When I was a kid,
 I had a great imagination.
 I could create anything.
 Like a small god
 whose powers were limited
 to wearing costumes
 and playing with dolls.

Today they are Action Figures;
 back then they were dolls
With movable parts
to let you pose them
in ready for action positions
Each 8 in. with an authentic costume.
 According to the ad.

I had one,
 sometimes two of each
 Superman—Batman and Robin
 Green Arrow—Supergirl—Batgirl
 Wonder Woman—
 both the 8 in and the later 12 in.
 based on Lynda Carter—
 Shazam—Aquaman—Joker
 Penguin—Riddler and Catwoman
 Spock
 (I wanted Captain Kirk,
 but Woolworths was out)
 Spider-Man—Hulk—Iron Man—
 Two of the Fantastic Four—
 Falcon—Green Goblin
 and Fonzie.

I had the Batcave
 but never did get the Hall of Justice.
 I did however, have a nice-sized box
 my dad made up to be the Hall of Justice.

There was G.I. Joe
 12 in. tall
 life-like hair and beard,
 scar on his cheek.
 He would say something like
Take cover
Run like hell
or Oh shit!
 When you pulled the string on his back.

Even had the 11 in.
 Colonel Steve Austin
 Astronaut
 a man barely alive
 with Bionic Eye—
 which was a hole in the back of his head
 with a small magnifying glass—
 Bionic Arm
 with a rubber skin sleeve over it.
 You rolled it up to work on his arm
 after he wore it out lifting
 the plastic engine block he came with.
 If you wanted to change him
 out of his red sweat suit and sneakers
 you had to buy his leisure suit separately.
 Same with the Bionic Woman.
 Fortunately Colonel Austin
 and Ken wore the same size clothes.

100



ME BRANDON SPARKS

My mother

decided that with all the fighting I had going on,
someone would need a doctor—
Dr. Ken and Nurse Barbie.
Ken never did do much.
Barbie was always in some type of danger:
kidnapped
dangled from over the ledge of the kitchen counter
spending time under G.I. Joe.
I didn't know anything about sex
other than there was kissing
and you were probably naked.
I figured a lot of that out when mom
got the new Charlie Rich album
and played "Behind Closed Doors"
over and over.
Joe and Barbie did it in front of the couch
in the den,
the couch being a mountain in the woods.

The living room was usually the desert
with the sofa a mountain
and the boomerang coffee table a ledge.

I had zip lines everywhere
from the Green Stamp bookshelf to the end table
and from the piano/
heliport/bad guys' hideout
to the other end table.

My toy room—

that is a converted garage to hold toys
for a child with no siblings in the house—
Had string hanging from the ceiling
so Batman and Robin could swing
from one end of the room to the other as the story dictated.

I would spend hours coming up with a storyline
plotting out movements
and directing the action.
All the figures in their places.

Then I would begin playing
acting out the story
just as I created it in my head.

Fonzie and Barbie were out doing something-
nothing that involved them being naked.
—Barbie was 11 in. Fonzi only 8 in.
G.I. Joe was 12 in. and could whip The Fonz's ass.
While out they stumble on The Joker and Green Goblin
robbing a bank.
They try to get word to the Hall of Justice
but the Riddler knocks them out before they can.
They're taken to the piano
where Penguin is waiting.
There he reveals his plan:
what they're going to do with the money
and they're never going to escape
because the Super Heroes don't know where they are.

Two of the Fantastic Four and Green Arrow
go to look for them, as they should have been back
with lunch hours ago.

They take G.I. Joe's jeep from the toy room,
stopping in the den to see if Colonel Austin has seen them,
which he hasn't but runs at Bionic speed to the kitchen
to look for them.

Two of the Four and Arrow proceed to the living room
where they are spotted by Riddler from the top of the piano
and shot at by a missile.

It narrowly misses.

Before the radio goes out the Invisible Woman
is able to let Spock know their location.
It went on like this until justice prevailed.

I would spend more time setting up,
trying to come up with scenarios
and making zip lines
than I would actually playing.
Just like a movie:
six months work
for an hour and a half film.



CUBIST BOY BRANDON SPARKS



I AM WHO I AM THOMAS ISAAC

I mostly played alone;
The other kids wouldn't play right.
Their idea of a fight was to bang
Spider-Man and the Penguin together 20 times
say "ouch" a few times, and Spider-Man is victorious.
This drove me insane.
Spider-Man is much stronger than Penguin.
and faster.
He would just have to cover him in a web
courtesy of mom's hair net,
and the fight's over.
If there was a fist fight,
I would choreograph the punches and kicks,
with the good guys always victorious,
unless one of the bad guys cheated
or sucker punched them.

Rob was the kid who lived across the street.
I played with him more than any other kids,
thereby making him my best friend.
Rob understood Super Heroes.
He knew Batman didn't have super powers
and played accordingly.
Even so,
after playing with him for about an hour
I was ready for him to go home
and be by myself.

I wasn't playing with my Super Heroes
or G.I. Joes as much when I turned eight.
Once I saw *Star Wars*.
These weren't the same dolls I grew up with.
These were 3 in. plastic figures
with clothes painted on
and no bendable joints.
The arms moved only at the shoulder
and the legs at the hip-
perfect for goose stepping.

Eventually, they made some 11 in. figures
with actual costumes.

It was soon after that Luke Skywalker
first met G.I. Joe and Hulk.

I would make up the same type of stories
and imaginary danger for my action figures
as I had for my dolls.

At three inches it's easier to lose them when
they're hiding from a scout team in the sofa.

For the past three years
I had been making up my own *Star Wars* stories,
Creating my own version of what happened
at the end of the first film.

It was 1980:
the *Empire Strikes Back* was coming out
and I couldn't wait.
Mom was watching the *700 Club*,
like she did every day,
waiting on her word of knowledge from Pat.

Before he could speak a word
to the bitter old woman with a bad hip
who alienated her kids and
smoked a pack and a half
of Tarrington 100's a day,
Pat had a guest.

This guest said Darth Vader was Satan
and Yoda a demon,
and if you really loved Jesus
and your children,
you wouldn't take them to see *Empire*.
Not only that, you would get rid of anything
in your house related to *Star Wars*.

I don't know how many action figures
the Millennium Falcon
an X-Wing fighter
a Tie Fighter

Land Speeder

Posters—Sheets

Burger King collectable glasses

a board game—cards—

All gone

Sold to my brother's

wife's

sister-in-law's

adopted son

for \$50.

Jesus just wanted them out of the house.

He didn't care if you sold them to heathens
to recoup some of your investment.

Soon after, my mom recalled

Adam West as Batman

going into a trance

and Superman hypnotizing someone—

Both of which are Satanic activities

if you read your Bible and

squint hard enough.

No one wanted to buy Superman

or Spider-Man or G.I. Joe,

so they ended up in a garbage bag.

Four actually.

How G.I. Joe ended up in there I don't know;

all he did was defend his country.

Perhaps because once I learned more about sex

he and Barbie started hooking up more often.

The wages of sin.

After that

I started watching a lot more television.

I almost never read

Before I read comic books,

but they'd all been thrown out.

So I just sat in front of the TV.

No thinking.

No creating.

I just watched.

Occasionally I'd wonder if Kimberly Drummond

would go out with me,

or how Valerie Bertinelli and that other girl

could be sisters when they looked nothing alike.

Then I got an Atari 2600

and there went the rest of my imagination.

I think it was Cinco De Mayo 1999-

Maybe it was just the weekend.

A bunch of friends were going out

but I was strapped for cash.

I think Step One is admitting you have a problem;

Pawning your TV, VCR and Super Nintendo

for beer money

may qualify under number one.

I never could afford to get my stuff out of hock,

So with nothing else to do in my apartment

I picked up a book,

One of the ones I said I'd read but never did.

After a while you don't miss TV.

Now I see these crappy movies at the video store

and wonder how they ever got made.

Who thought that sounded like a good idea?

And wish I was still that creative,

That I had an idea for a movie.

Something where Superman—

Batman and Robin—Wonder Woman

Green Arrow—Supergirl—Batgirl

Spider-Man—Two of the Fantastic Four

Iron Man—Falcon—Hulk and the Fonz

take on Joker—Penguin—Riddler and Catwoman.

They enlist the help of G.I. Joe and his

Adventure Team.

But not the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

That would be silly.





LEAVING CRAIG ERICKSON

Machine Heart

COLBY DOMINO

Looking back on
the ups
the downs

I tape those scattered
memories
together in my mind
like film
for a midnight showing
at an empty theatre
located somewhere between
where I am,
where I used to be,
a few milligrams of distraction
and where I want to go.
Replacing the
award winning roles and script
with a new generation
of temporary friends
I have forced myself
to know and love

to make up for the ones
I lost along the way.
I try to organize
and make sense of the madness.
Like a desperate attempt
to repair a broken cup
for one last use.
Throughout everything
The ins
The outs
I still have life in my veins
I still have fire in my bones.
I still see the colors
and I still hear the music.
I'm going through changes
but in the end
I know it's going to be
ok.
With a hungry spirit
I hold steadfast.
With a Machine Heart
I am still the lion man.



ME AND A TREE CRAIG ERICKSON

The Campout

LINDA BROOKS ALRED

In the arms of a tree,
a willow bent to the ground.
Leafy curtain shielding,
sheltering my limbs
with its own twisted arteries,
rooted at the water's edge.
Wind rocks my perch
and I feel kin to this
fortress which comforts me.

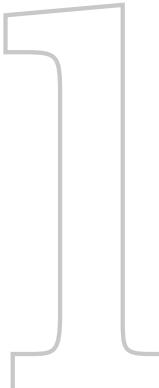
Sun rushes through the veil
and dances in my eyes, upon my arms
encircling my protector.
This knarled guardian
has withstood the summer storms,
and taken in the rain.
But now my cheek,
pressed against this ragged skin,

anticipates the shedding,
the letting go,
giving in
mutely to the fall.
Across the sky,
winter comes.
Throat to the wind
I keen our loss.



The Swing

LAUREL LEIGH PHILLIPS



I end with a sigh.

It is the taste of memory—the smell of raw cinnamon and evergreen, the night air rushing at my fingertips, that song of hopes and dreams. I am swinging through the night, high into the trees, until I feel the chill and fall.

I dreamed I held you again. Your empty stare became a hole in my arms. I couldn't find my breath in the question. Why?

It's my birthday. The junipers sway in the summer night's breeze. You carry me through the darkness after cake and clowns and silver ballerinas. The moon lights a hole in the trees, and it waits under a blanket of leaves.

I leap from your arms, reach for the seat. You lift me up, but I beg not to do it alone.

We swing to the rhythm of nursery rhymes and circus tunes. I hold my breath. We fly to meet the hole in the trees, where the moonlight dances with our shadows. You hold me tightly on your lap and I throw my arms up to sweep the star-dusted sky. We swing even higher and I shudder—a strong temptation, my soul's only secret. We jump and land softly with a graceful pirouette. The grand finale.

I drew the dry piece of wood from the ground. I held it to my ear. It told stories of a missing mother, flowing river, empty creek. It clung to my hands, and I carved roaring lions, bouncing balls, and a girl flying on the trapeze.

I chose the tree with a hundred cradling arms. I bound the branch in splintering rope and gentle promises. I begged the seat to hold you close, to never let you go. An unforgiving knot, the test of time, secured your fate.

It is years of unfound dreams, save one. Nightfall whispers and I answer its song. I flee with arms outstretched, grasping the breeze as it slips through my fingers.

I reached for your hands in the shadows.

It is adrenaline pumping and ecstasy and bliss as I inhale life from the biting wind. It is dreams and promises flying past the moonlight glowing through the hole in the trees. It is fear, a loss, a moment, slipping away.



BLACK OCEAN JANANI JEGANATHAN

The Worst Disaster Ever

JESSICA GONSOULIN

Maybe a shark head-bumped
a piling of the oil rig in the Gulf,
tapping into secret volcanoes,
exploding the rig in a meteor shower.
The drill pipe bent like a soda straw
and sank 5000 feet,
regurgitating oil
like an artery in a brain hemorrhage.
Oil floated up and spread out,
covering the surface of the water
with smothering black shadows.
Fingers of fire shrieked for help.
Flames gobbled up the floor
as alarms sounded like a rock band,

and workers dived in the cool water.
The oil headed along the Southern coast
to be swept into the loop current.
Fishing came to a stop—forbidden.
Fishermen volunteered for cleanup
like soldiers going off to war.
Zoologists bathed turtles and seagulls
and shipped them off to distant wetlands.
Meanwhile, BP made numerous attempts
to cut off the flow with engineering schemes,
such as Top Shot, Top Kill, and LMP,
knocking out Hazmat crews on the beaches
with cleanup chemicals as all waited weeks
for sure-fire relief wells to be ready.

And Nature Sings

BARBARA BLANKS

In a field-site forest in North Carolina,
surrounded by corn and cotton fields,
sound is cushioned and hushed
by pine needles littering the ground.

There, a biologist hooked microphones
to loblolly branches,
rigged up recording equipment,
and left the stage to the players:
Mice.

She was not trying to capture
the chitter and squeaking of lab mice,
but the secret songs sung in the wild.

She almost missed it—
a sound too high for human ears to hear.
But played at slow speed
to lower the frequency,
she heard a four-note song—
the plaintive,
lyrical rise and fall
of a deer mouse crooning,
sounding a bit like the love song of a whale.



THE EAST WINDOW CRAIG ERICKSON



Characters as Archetypes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

THOMAS JACKSON

IT IS REPORTED THAT IN 1862, when Harriet Beecher Stowe met President Lincoln in the White House, he remarked, "So you are the little lady that wrote the book that started this Great War." (Reynolds) Whether this exchange actually happened or not is irrelevant; what is true is the anti-slavery, bestselling book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did indeed have a place in the list of causes of the American Civil War. It was immediately embraced by the abolitionist north and reviled by the pro-slavery south. As this timeless book is translated to a twenty-first century audience, it is obvious that Stowe has created characters that have taken on different or even iconic connotations, others that miss the mark as archetypes in their didactic nature, and scenes that have become the standard image for particular stereotypes throughout American history .

Today when someone is called an "Uncle Tom," it is a hateful comment generally from one black person to another, insinuating that the person is somehow complacent, suppliant toward the white race. Though Tom was a genial, obedient slave in Stowe's book, his was the strongest moral character in the story:

**No, I mean, really, Tom is a good, steady, sensible, pious fellow.
He got religion. At a camp meeting, four years ago; and I believe
he really did get it. I've trusted him, since then, with everything
I have, - money, house, horses, - and let him come and go round
the country; and I have always found him true and square in
everything. (Stowe 1701-1702)**

This was Haley, Tom's current owner from Kentucky, describing Tom to Mr. Shelby, a slave trader. Haley really believed in the goodness of his slave Tom, a fact accepted by Mr. Shelby, as long as the qualifier that Tom was honest - for a slave - was added. Tom's passivity was not due to an acceptance of being inferior, but instead to his profound faith in the Christian religion. He believed in the goodness of God and that all things were by His will. He believed that he must love all and endure life's trials, and that God would see him through.

As a Christ-figure archetype, Tom transcends the simple meaning of the book to become an allegorical Christian hero. His piety shows that no matter what trouble the world shoves at him, he will remain faithful:

...No, no Missis! I've lost everything, -wife, children, home, and kind master, -and he would have set me free if he'd only lived a week longer; I've lost everything in this world, and it's clean gone forever, -and now I Can't lose Heaven, too; no, I can't get to be wicked, besides all.

(Stowe 1782)

Ah, the biblical Job is seen here in Tom's lamentations. Tom shows here how his faith in the Lord is uppermost in his life. Raised in a Calvinist household by her influential father, Stowe's religious values are reflected in Tom's undying faith, even in the face of great tragedy and adversity. The scene involving Tom's death and the conversion to Christ of the slaves Sambo and Quimbo is reminiscent of Jesus on the cross with the two thieves:

Tom says, "Poor critters!...I'd be willing to bar' all I have, if it'll only bring ye to Christ! O, Lord! Give me these two more souls, I pray."

(Stowe Kindle)

Stowe's purpose in the character of Tom is to be Christ-like in his actions and beliefs, not to show him as a helpless supplicant, which is implied by the modern archetype. One can see Pontius Pilot in the actions of Simon Legree; the similarities between these characters and the Biblical telling of the crucifixion are striking. The allusion is complete, and this delineates the never-ending struggle of good versus evil, and good's inevitable victory with one's acceptance of Christ.

Though "Uncle Tom" is the most ubiquitous reference to this novel in the modern world, Stowe's minor characters make their impact as well. As antithesis to the goodness of Tom, Simon Legree is the hateful, evil, white slave master from the Deep South. It is interesting that Stowe seems to differentiate between the whites in the Deep South and those from the Upper South. Her characters in Kentucky, even though they do own slaves, are portrayed as benevolent, kind, and even loving masters, whereas Mr. Legree from Louisiana, associated with the violence and cruelty of the Deep South, is the epitome of evil:

"I hate him!" said Legree, that night, as he sat up in his bed; "I hate him! And isn't he mine? Can't I do what I like with him? Who's to hinder, I wonder?" And Legree clenched his fist, and shook it, as if he had something in his hands that he could rend in pieces. (Stowe 1788)

With this rant, Simon Legree has decided to kill the slave Tom. He tells the world that this slave, this man, this human being, belongs to him and he can do whatever he wants to do with his property. This is a very powerful condemnation of slavery as it exposes slavery's inherent contradiction to humanity. The essence of the book resides in these few lines. In today's vernacular, the name Simon Legree has

become a euphemism for evil, specifically when it comes to the inhumane treatment of one's fellow man, a reference that is appropriate when considering the actions and attitudes of Stowe's character.

"Come here Jim Crow," said he [Shelby]. The child came up, and the master patted the curly head and chucked him under the chin.

(Stowe 1702)

"Jim Crow" was the iconic pet name Mr. Shelby gave to Harry, the young son of the slave Eliza. He called him this when he wanted the boy to perform for him. Harry would dance and sing and do imitations - anything to please his master. After the War Between the States, the white southerners enacted what were called Black Codes. These were laws that set expectations as to how Blacks should behave in their everyday lives so as to not offend their white superiors - again, anything to please the "masters." These laws were instituted to control the newly freed African American slaves. They became known throughout history as "Jim Crow laws," because of their connection to Stowe's character, another lasting legacy of the novel.

Along with the iconic, archetypal characters in her book, Stowe also creates memorable characters that attempt to teach moral lessons. For example, in Evangeline St. Claire, known as Eva, the small white girl that Tom meets on his way down south to be sold, Stowe has created an almost holy character. Eva is small, always dressed in white, and is the angelic little daughter of Augustine St. Claire (Stowe 1753). Eva is portrayed as the perfect child: a completely moral, Christian, little girl. She does not see any difference in blacks and whites and does not feel slavery is right. In fact, **"Often and often she walked mournfully round the place where Haley's gang of men and women sat in their chains. She would glide in among them, and look at them with an air of perplexed and sorrowful earnestness; and sometimes she would lift their chains with her slender hands, and then sigh woefully, as she glided away."** (Stowe 1754), showing an almost saintly disdain and concern with the way these slaves were treated. When asked by her father why she wanted him to buy Tom, she replied **"I want to make him [Tom] happy."** (Stowe 1756), a selfless act in a world that treats these humans as chattel.

Alas, Eva falls ill, and her death bed scene is troubling. Eva asks all the slaves to gather around her, and she gives each a lock of her hair and begs them to be Christian, so they will all meet again in heaven. Stowe has given this five year old girl a force of will beyond her young age. This death bed sermon from little Eva is powerful and emotional, but also just slightly unbelievable. The scene is too obvious in its similarity to the Last Supper with Jesus and His disciples, a completely inappropriate comparison because of the vast differences in the contexts. Eva is a five year old little girl on her death bed; she is not giving her life to atone for the sins of humanity. She is an insightful young lady with a kind heart who believes that slavery is wrong. She is not the savior of any group of people, in bondage or not.

Stowe, in her zeal, diminished Eva's impact in trying to bestow this type of sainthood on her. A young girl might have mature insight and a generous, caring heart, but she does not possess the power or maturity to understand the complexities of slavery and its associated consequences. Thus this character, though one to model, does not become a cultural icon.

Lastly, Stowe creates scenes in her novel that have become archetypal standards in later literature and film. Picture the scene: a silent movie, grainy film, organ music playing dolefully in the theater. On the screen our heroine, usually a pretty, slender white girl, is being chased by either bad men with evil intent, dogs slathering to rend her arms from her body, or Indians on the war path. She comes to the river and her only hope of escape is to jump among the ice floes that are cascading downstream rocking and rolling away. Bravely she makes the attempt and either is successful, to prove that women are brave and powerful, or falls and is pulled from the soup by a masculine hero. **"It was now early spring, and the river was swollen and turbulent; great cakes of floating ice were swinging heavily to and fro in the turbid waters."** (**Stowe Kindle**); this scene, taken directly from Stowe's book of the escape of Eliza and her son Harry, is the stereotypical adventure of the damsel in distress. Eliza's experience has been translated into thousands of other stories, with different character names and contexts, but the adventure is the same; a helpless girl needing to save herself or be saved, to prove herself worthy of respect and admiration or to reinforce the idea that she is weak and needs a male protector. The story is the same since Stowe created it so many years ago.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is an important book for many reasons. It was considered by many to be the spark that ignited a national tragedy, but it is more than just that incendiary trigger. It is also a timeless piece of classic literature that transformed society with its ideas and iconic characters and transcended it's time to teach lessons that changed a nation's way of thinking in its most tumultuous era. Stowe created characters that started a political firestorm in nineteenth century America and that have retained their relevancy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Good will always face evil; evil will always present itself as a formidable force; and, with faith and strength, good will always win. Stowe understood this and used these concepts not only to fight for the end of slavery, but also to transform the hearts and minds of white America.

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Us Vs. Them

D. KNAPE

Often we long
To be someone else
Thinking that will help
Improve ourselves

Yet being them
Makes little sense
We wish we could
But know we can't

If we could be them
Who would they be?
It's rather perplexing
Personally

We can't be them
We must be we
'cause us is all
we'll ever be.

**WAITING FOR LOVE**

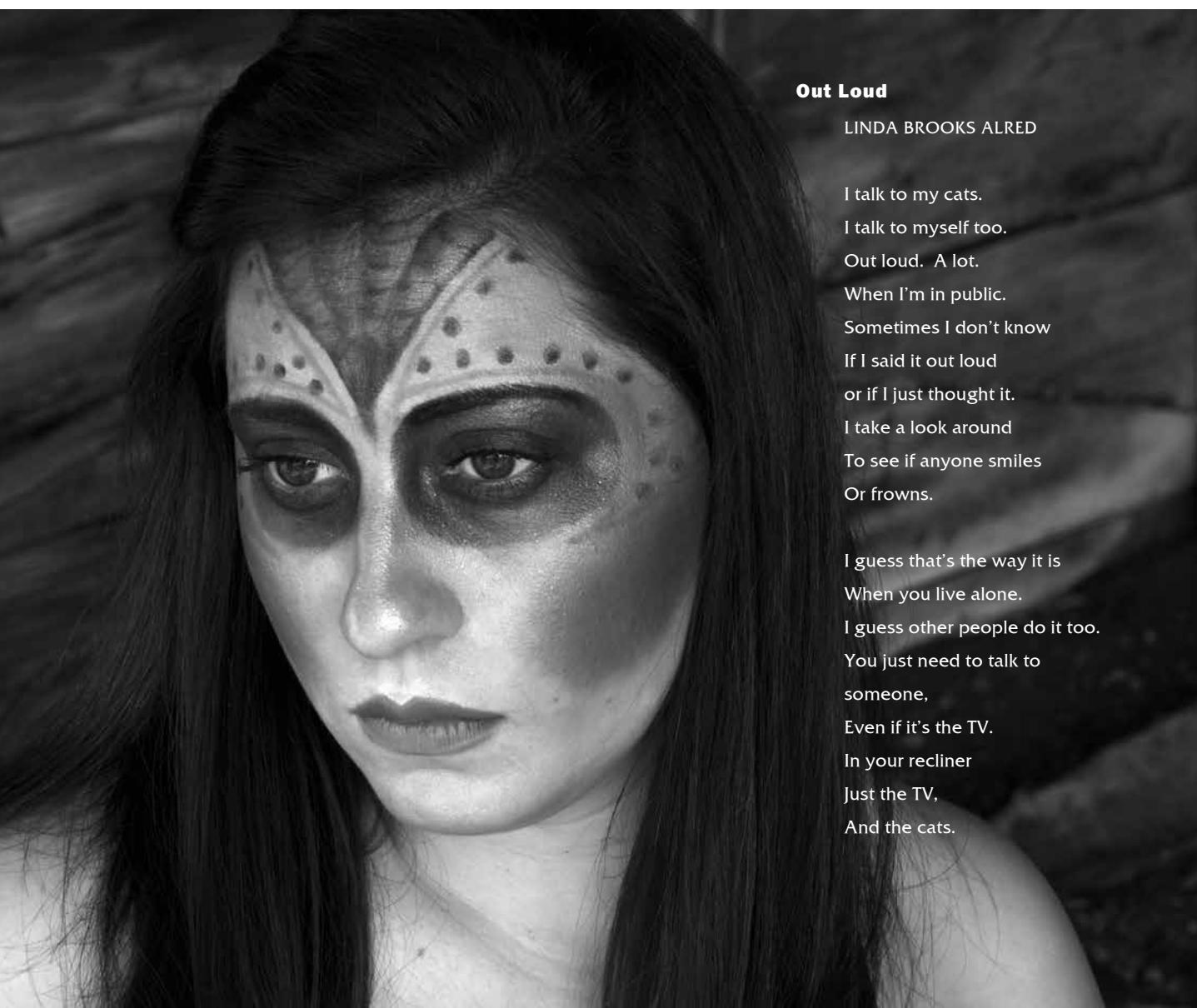
MELISSA TURNER

Two Worlds (1962)

BETH TURNER AYERS

There were two houses on the corner, just down the street.
We stayed on the pavement and passed with speed.
They didn't belong there.
But the rules of tradition didn't seem to apply.
Two shacks stood together, alone on my side.
Referenced with hushed voice.
Too young to care or begin to understand,
I knew that passing meant a tight grip on my hand.
I grew and walked alone.
And I noticed the detail: disrepair, cluttered yard,
Hand-washed clothes on leaning line, life was hard.
But life lived there.
Though seldom seen, hidden by rickety walls of gray,
Vacant of laughter or sounds of play.
Then there she was.
With bright shining eyes, a smile filled her face,
She jumped the frayed rope with style, with grace.
She saw me.
She paused in her play and she spoke a few words.
"Can you play with me?" I listened and heard.
I wanted to.
"I have to ask my mother." Came my reply.
Mama's answer came quickly. I didn't know why
But I had to stay inside.
It made no sense to me. The contradiction was clear.
Thelma's dark arms could hold me, she could tickle my ear.
I could love her.
But when Thelma went home, she crossed to her side.
She lived in the world where resentment could hide.
Close, but far away.
Don't ask to play with the child who jumps rope in the yard,
That doesn't belong... where life seems hard.
No playing allowed.
And I felt lonely for myself and lonely for the girl
Who lived on the corner in a different world.

WE ALL WEAR A MASK SARAH TURNER



Out Loud

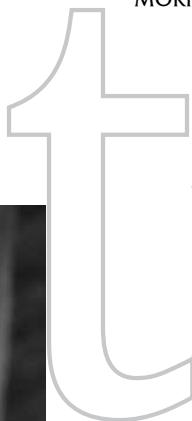
LINDA BROOKS ALRED

I talk to my cats.
I talk to myself too.
Out loud. A lot.
When I'm in public.
Sometimes I don't know
If I said it out loud
or if I just thought it.
I take a look around
To see if anyone smiles
Or frowns.

I guess that's the way it is
When you live alone.
I guess other people do it too.
You just need to talk to
someone,
Even if it's the TV.
In your recliner
Just the TV,
And the cats.

Long-Distance Relationship

MORIAH WALTON



THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY does not mean very much to a child of eight years to begin with, much less when said child is faced with the enchantment of a recently arrived bank of fog. Thus, when my sainted mother attempted to pry me away from my two-hour perch at the window that misty winter day with the lure of a history magazine, I would not be moved. The woman baffled me. There was a sea of crystalline drops suspended outside like the sighing whispers of a million aqueous faeries and she was rattling on about paper and ink: clearly a mark of insanity. In this conviction, I might have remained forever plastered to the window. But I live in Texas, land of the bipolar weather. Within ten minutes, my fairyland was swallowed by a violent thunderstorm that swept over the countryside without so much as a “pardon-me” by way of apology.

Devastation has a funny way of settling in an eight year-old, particularly when said eight year-old is wildly imaginative. In my childish frustration, I determined the best way to show the weather my displeasure was to completely ignore it. Affecting a ridiculous air of nonchalance, I flounced my way through the house in a royal snit, fully intending to show the weather who was boss by reading whatever it was my mom had offered me earlier. It was in this preposterous state beneath the tendrils of a thousand arcs of lighting I was ignoring that I first met Dr. Tesla.

The man did not notice me. He was sitting quite at his ease, fully immersed in a book. Piercing eyes pored over the tome, oblivious to all save its words. The book intrigued me. I knew any number of boring old men who would sit in chairs, but my bookish self instantly connected to a man who would choose to do it with a book. My unconcealed enchantment with this tall, athletic physicist went completely undetected by the individual in question. This may seem odd, but was hardly surprising to me. He had, you see, been dead for 58 years.

I KNEW ANY NUMBER OF BORING OLD
MEN WHO WOULD SIT IN CHAIRS,
BUT MY BOOKISH SELF INSTANTLY
CONNECTED TO A MAN WHO WOULD
CHOOSE TO DO IT WITH A BOOK.

Eleven years ago, a photograph republished in a children's history magazine reached out with a tendril of lightning and sparked in my brain a fascination with history that never died. Over a decade later, the same photo graces my computer background, unchanged by time. I stand in stark contrast to this timelessness:

Nikola Tesla, Father of the Modern Age, is past the point of changing, but every minute changes me. Yet here he is, scattered throughout a hundred of my notes, the inventor of alternating current morphed aptly into the spark that flared into the historian I have become.

Pursuing a double major in communication studies and history, I often marvel at the relationship between a biographer and their subject. I can cite the letters, patents, and even diaries of a man I

have never met. My knowledge of his library seems akin to that of a close friend who often raids it, but the library is no more.

The sentimentalist in me cries every tenth of July for a genius forgotten, but the student in me wonders what can be learned from the communication of the biographer and the subject.

Can it even be called a relationship? The idea verges on the macabre. Yet my dictionary lists the word as defined by the concept of two or more things with a significant connection. Surely, the connection of an historical subject and the tireless, exhaustively thorough historian mad enough to call herself a biographer qualifies as significant. A very loud voice within me thinks so, though it has probably been largely biased by a thousand sleepless nights of research which beg with no small affront not to be addressed as anything less than significant.

SOMEONE WHO KNOWS EVERY DETAIL OF A PERSON THEY HAVE NEVER MET; THE DEFINITION MATCHES THAT OF A STALKER.

There is also the matter of technical connection by name. Years from now, when my research is finally complete and my work reaches publication, my name will be permanently connected with that of Tesla, the subject of my work. Yet Tesla is only one drop in the inkwell of my projects. If the idea of connection by name must apply universally, then I am also related to Capt. Hook, the subject of another project. If both cases count as a significant connection, it could mean the inventor of the radio is related to the pirate captain by a degree of separation found in me. If the subject must be real, then we fare little better: I am also the author of a short history of spoons. Lunacy was never before more useful for eating soup.

Or perhaps it is not so ridiculous. An old professor once told me that humanity is comprised of an endless web of connections which ties us all together. If a web is to accomplish a task of this enormity, it is almost certainly required to make a few logic-defying leaps now and then. Perhaps one of these leaps is through time, because the notion of one person whose death warrant was signed in 1943 inspiring a wild imp of a girl half a century later defies human explanation. Perhaps this is evidence of some sort of immortality of the human soul; perhaps this is God's way of working through time; perhaps this is a question for quantum theorists, not writers; or perhaps I simply read too many books for my own good.

The concept of history defies explanation to a being that exists in the present, much more so when enhanced by the concept of a human who existed at one time but cannot be spoken to now. Accordingly, the concept of an historical biographer defies explanation. Someone who knows every detail of a person they have never met; the definition matches that of a stalker. The scientist in me is horrified at any notion of something that cannot be explained, the writer in me is fighting the

urge to wax preposterously poetic about the effrontery of being compared to a stalker, but there is another thought as well.

The part of me that used to be eight years old sees a photograph and, having little concept of history, decides that she wants to get to know its subject. She does so in the only ways she can. That part of me is the part that now smiles at lightning storms instead of ignoring them, the part that knows the capital of Serbia, and the part that jumps at a chance to read any biography it can find. If the effect of any relationship is the subtle changes we pick up along the way, I certainly owe a deal to mine with the man Edison despised.

Recently, I woke up to find another crystalline bank of fog settled over my house. Rather than contemplate it from my window, I took a book and joined the faeries outside. Time never made much sense to me anyway. Nikola Tesla died over half a century before I was born. He was one of the greatest men I now know.

A Chest Full of Lessons®

SHARON ORSBORN

There's a chest in the sunroom that I don't open much.
It's full of dog tags and medals, and report cards and such.
It's a box not much bigger than a suitcase is.
And it's filled with things that once were his.
What the box really holds is a story too brief
of happiness and memories, and a whole lot of grief.

Grief is a process that takes time and tears.
It's not over in weeks or months or years.
It takes as long as it takes, I would say.
It gets a bit better with each passing day.

It ebbs and it flows like the ocean tide.
As time goes by it begins to subside.
A tide that once raged becomes a mere neap.
Occasional tears replace a great need to weep.

The chest in the sunroom will always be there,
a reminder of life and things that aren't fair.
But it's tucked away now; it doesn't take too much space.
And what I've learned from it will not go to waste.

The learning is a part of the me I've become.
It's a piece of a puzzle that's nearly done.
I have had other lessons, too many to list.
But up until now this one had been missed.

And as much as I hate it I have to say,
it has helped me become all I am today.
Who I am today is not the same as before.
The chest has led me through a different door.

It's a door to knowledge of the human spirit
with a lesson for all who would listen and hear it.
Each of us is a product of what we've been through.
We are the end result of the old and the new.

Memories and grief are stored in that chest.
And the lessons it taught me may be the best yet.



BIG FORT MORGAN 1 CLARK

Ghost Patrol

CALEB S. CAGE

HE TURNED AT THE DOORWAY to his new room as he exited, checking first to make sure that he had all he needed. He patted the chest of his body armor for his glasses, darted his eyes upward to make sure he was wearing his helmet, and slapped his ammo pouch to make sure he had all seven of his loaded magazines. Then he took a deep breath and walked to his line of vehicles where his guys were waiting for him.

He was nervous, partly because he was addressing his platoon as their platoon leader for the first time in country and partly because he was about to lead his first patrol in sector. He could feel it in his chest. It made his saliva heavy, ruining the Copenhagen he had packed into his lip, making him wish he had filled the Camelback that his commander had made everyone zip tie to the back of their green flak vests.

He quietly cursed how the gravel shifted under his feet and his new full weight, complete with more gear than he had ever worn before. He could hear generators running and he could smell their fuel, but he still had no idea where they were on the base. Before he rounded the last corner between him and his guys he stopped in his tracks, realizing that he left his can of dip sitting on the small wooden box he was using as his nightstand. He hit the illumination button on his watch—0300: he had plenty of time to head back to his room before their patrol. He cursed his lack of rituals, his total lack of perspective as he walked back to his room.

HE RECOGNIZED BOTH AS
POSTURES OF ANXIETY, AND
WONDERED BRIEFLY HOW IT
WAS MANIFESTING IN HIM.

By the time he got back to his line, his guys were waiting for him, dressed in their mismatched desert and woodland camo, weighted down with all of the gear they had been issued over the last six months, and roughly arranged by squad. A few of them were leaning quietly against their trucks, and a couple of the younger guys were horsing around and laughing loudly. He recognized both as postures of anxiety, and wondered briefly how it was manifesting in him. His platoon sergeant, Clemens, a young sergeant from Kentucky, walked up to him to hand him the paperwork: 0415, three-hour patrol in Ehstadt, 4 vehicles, 20 troops. He signed it and Clemens sent a runner from the platoon to the battalion TOC to turn it in.

He headed towards his truck, a M1114 up-armored humvee that carried five—two soldiers in the back passenger seats, a gunner sticking out the top, and him and his driver in the front seats. The trunk space was packed with body bags, stretchers, and everything needed to shut down traffic in a heavily populated city. The space between the back seats was filled with crates and cases of ammo. Each of the four trucks in his platoon, the Ghost Platoon, was wrapped in armor and armored glass.

IT SEEMED MORE PERSONAL NOW, BUT THAT DIDN'T MEAN HE COULD MAKE ANY MORE SENSE OF THEM.

"Talon X-ray, Talon X-ray, this is Ghost 6, radio check, over," he said into the battalion hand mic.

"Ghost 6, Talon X-ray, lima charlie, over," a bored voice came back over the radio, using a shorthand that was forbidden and that he probably wouldn't have used if there was anyone above a captain awake at this hour.

"Roger that, Talon X-ray, Ghost 6 out," he repeated, allowing himself to break from protocol a bit as well. He repeated the same process on his platoon freq. Sergeants Johnson and Thomas, his first and second squad leaders, answered up clearly, and Sergeant Clemens' driver answered that the platoon sergeant was handling some issue, something to do with a tow bar.

A green flare shot into the sky from their west, followed closely by a red flare. At first he thought they were tracer fire, but they slowed as they reached their apex and drifted eerily as they burned out. He had seen them every night since he had gotten there three weeks before, just as

he had heard loud explosions in the city when he knew no American forces were out on the road. It seemed more personal now, but that didn't mean he could make any more sense of them.

"Comms are good, V," he said to his driver, the one responsible for making sure that he could talk to battalion and to the rest of his platoon. "Crystal clear."

"We got lucky, sir," Specialist Valdez said, trying to figure out how to align his night vision goggles with his right eye. "The 4th ID guys gave us all of their excess radio equipment before they left and a lot of it was brand new," he said, not taking his eyes off of his helmet mount.

"All through training a Hohenfels and Graf our comms sucked," the platoon leader said. "I actually just thought they were supposed to sound like they had something living in them."

"These ones work pretty good," V said.

He left V alone after that. He had more responsibilities than most soldiers in the platoon, and he had obviously been working for several hours to make sure everything was going to go right once they headed out of the wire. Maybe he was worried that he wasn't going to have time to get his NVGs adjusted in time, he thought. Maybe he was just worried.

"Thanks for getting everything ready to go, V," he said, and walked away, not waiting for a response.

Sergeant Clemens walked up to him, contemplating fresh grease on his hand. There was a brief discussion confirming that everything they could think of was complete and an exchange of head nods that confirmed that they were ready even if they couldn't find the words to say so. He walked back to his humvee in the front, running, lights on, Harrison, his gunner, posted in the hatch

while V smoked a cigarette outside the door. He assumed that Clemens was experiencing a similar scene as he got into his own vehicle.

"Ghost Platoon, Ghost Platoon, radio check, over," he said into his platoon mic receiving clear responses from his squad leaders and from Clemens. At his next transmission they began moving the several hundred meters towards the operating base's only entrance and exit. "This is Ghost 6, break," he said next. "Let me know when we're red, over," he said, charging a round into his M4 rifle and making sure everyone else in his truck did the same, then listening to make sure his other three vehicles had done the same.

He paused for a moment, trying to see if the tightness in his chest had dissipated, and tapped the can of tobacco in his right cargo pocket.

"Talon X-ray, this is Ghost 6, over," he said into the battalion freq.

"Ghost 6, go ahead, over," the answer came back, even lazier than it had been before.

"Talon X-ray, Ghost 6, break," he said, releasing the button on his mic. "Ghost Platoon SP FOB Warrior time now, over."

"Roger, out."

**HE HAD HOPED HIS VOICE
WOULD BE MORE GRAVELLY,
HIS TONE MORE GRIZZLED,
BUT IT WASN'T.**

V pressed down on the gas and moved them slowly onto the blacktop of Highway 1, headed west. He always thought he would sound different, more confident, more in command the first time he announced his platoon's entrance into the combat zone. He had hoped his voice would be more gravelly, his tone more grizzled,

but it wasn't. He sounded like himself, hiccupping slightly from the tobacco juices he had had to swallow and trembling slightly from everything that he was unable to.

Within a few seconds, Clemens told him that all of the vehicles were on the road, looking like a porcupine, just as they had been told. As they started to hit their stride down Highway 1, two more flares, this time red then green bursts above Ehstadt. He slapped Harrison's leg, asking him if he was hearing anything out there. Not much, the answer came back; just some homemade power lines crackling overhead and a few dogs howling. He asked the same of his sergeants over the radio, but they couldn't hear anything from behind their bulletproof glass either. He called in his second checkpoint to X-ray, and told V the comms were still perfect.

Ehstadt was basically the southern half of the city, south of Highway 1, which ran through the city from east to west. Gaufurt sat to the north. In actuality, there were six or seven smaller villages that made up each sector, sometimes daring to cross into the opposite sector, each with proper Arabic names, histories, and identities. Someone at battalion had decided to name the sectors after the two towns nearest their base in Bavaria. The battalion operations officer described the decision as one that would give the guys a taste of home when they were out on patrol, a statement made eyes of the lieutenants dart around the room trying to catch each other's knowing glances. Ghost Platoon was the first platoon of Charlie Company, and it was their responsibility to patrol Ehstadt.

He turned south off of the highway, which was really only a four-lane road that bisected the city, and told X-ray where his platoon was. They were now conducting their presence patrol, he

told them, serpentine through the small villages in the northern part of the city at five miles an hour or so, looking for curfew breakers, insurgents, or anything else that looked out of place. The only time he had been through this town before was during the daytime, when it didn't look at all daunting or dangerous. At night, through the green filters of night vision goggles, every shadow looked darker, every parked car looked weighted down like a car bomb.

**HE LOOKED OUT HIS WINDOW AT
THE LIFELESS HOMES MERE INCHES
FROM HIS WINDOW, NOT A LIGHT
OR A CURIOUS SET OF EYES COMING
THROUGH THE CLOTH CURTAINS.**

Once they turned off of the main road for a presence patrol, they had no set course. He would push his platoon in any direction he wanted to, trying his best to never retrace over the same path. It would be easy to decide where to go if there was gunfire or explosions in any part of town, he figured, but with nothing but a few errant flares, he had nothing to move towards, nothing to chase.

He told V to take a sharp turn down a narrow dirt road between two small brick houses. They couldn't see very far down it, but it looked passable, and it looked like there was some ambient light twenty meters down or so. They moved slowly at first, tentatively. V spoke of his unease for the first time, but kept moving forward in the absence of his platoon leader's direction. They rocked in their seats when his front, right tire slid into a shallow trench, but they were able to keep moving forward even at the new angle.

He looked out his window at the lifeless homes mere inches from his window, not a light or a curious set of eyes coming through the cloth

curtains. He settled back in his seat, hoping they would be able to make it through the narrow alley to the other side when Harrison alerted them to their next problem. The houses were connected by a web of power cords, some looking like they had recently been attached to a toaster or coffee maker, held up by long branches, at best, or by metal tent poles at worst. They were higher out on the main roads, but in this alley they were low enough to catch the long, metal radio antenna on the back of their humvee.

"It's catching and sparking, sir," Harrison said, covering his head in case the antenna released and lurched forward on top of him.

"Can you grab it?" he yelled up to Harrison.

"Yeah, hang on," he said, already lifting himself out through the gunner's hatch and walking down the back of the humvee.

"Hope he doesn't shock himself," V said, without a hint of the disdain that he usually had in his voice when he talked about the gunner.

"He's fine," the platoon leader said, watching Harrison wrestle with the antenna through his rearview. "Ghost Platoon, Ghost 6, break," he said into his platoon mic. "We've got low wires overhead in this alley, break. Get your gunners to jump out and pull your antennas forward until we get through this, over." His sergeants confirmed that they were doing so. Clemens said that he had tied his down before they left the base, embarrassed that he hadn't made the whole platoon do the same.

"No worries," he said, recognizing the sheepish tones of Clemens' response. "There'll always be another patrol," he said, V's uncontested seven mile per hour pace made him confident that they could make it through the alley now that the antennas were down, a confidence that was only augmented when the nose of his humvee

poked out into a cross street twice as wide and with electric cords twice as high. He smiled when Clemens confirmed that all of their vehicles were back on the road, matching V's self-assured ten miles per hour. His voice was crisp when he called in his platoon's coordinates into battalion. His mind was clear when he ordered V to speed up towards the two green flares that were fired in the air a few hundred meters to their direct front.

He was sitting forward in his seat when they got to their best guess of where the flares had originated. Valdez slowed down without having to be told. The platoon leader pulled the Copenhagen from his cargo pocket, packed it with his forefinger, and pushed a tight lump of it into his mouth. He was scanning and seeing nothing. He asked Harrison, but he wasn't hearing anything either. He called into X-ray, but they confirmed that no one was reporting anything unusual within sector.

**HE KNEW THEY WOULD SPEND THEIR
WHOLE YEAR FIGHTING A PHANTOM
THAT THEY WOULD RARELY
GET A CHANCE TO CONFRONT.**

Whoever shot the flares, or had been shooting the flares all night, was not going to present himself when a four-vehicle porcupine crawled down his street. He knew that. He knew that they were probably staring down at him from a rooftop on this or some other nearby street, and that they would never be so dumb as to engage them directly.

He was still sitting straight as they rounded the city blocks and moved towards daytime market areas throughout Ehstadt. They were unopposed, free to move without any concern. For the first time in the three weeks since he had been in

country, he felt like the war was his to lose. He had faith in their windows, their armor, and their vastly superior weapon systems. He knew that he and his guys had been trained as well as they possibly could have been trained, and their will to survive would take care of the rest.

He stared down into a garbage bucket that had been pulled down off of the sidewalk and onto the street. He told Valdez to speed up a little bit as they pulled back onto the black top that would take them deeper into the villages of Ehstadt. He swallowed a thin steam of tobacco juice and called in their latest coordinates to a barely awake Talon X-ray. Even Valdez broke a smile when the platoon leader pinched Harrison hard on his inner thigh, after the gunner started to announce the presence of fictitious insurgents to their front, pretending their boring first patrol was more excited than it really was.

"Talon X-ray this is Ghost 6, RP FOB Warrior time now, break," he said an uneventful half hour later as his platoon pulled slowly through the gates outside their base. "Negative contact, nothing significant to report, over."

"Ghost 6, roger out."

They cleared their weapons at the barrels just inside the wire. He wished they had arrested the guy who was taunting them with flares. He wished they had killed someone planting a bomb on the side of the road as they drove past. He wished he knew which ones of his guys were going to die there. But he knew that those wishes were fruitless. He knew they would spend their whole year fighting a phantom that they would rarely get a chance to confront. And he knew that doing so would guarantee that he would take home a platoon that was only a shadow of what it was tonight.



BIKE BOY KIMBERLY WASHINGTON

Memory

JASON SHIROMA

The ocean has no memory of wars and battles fought.
It holds the secrets in its depths, and still it has forgot.
The forest has no memory of what the wind has brought.
It reached the highest mountain peaks and still it has forgot.
The sky, it too, has no memory of when the moon is not.
At night the stars appear again and still it has forgot.
But we as man have memory, a history so vast
if we never learn from our mistakes. We will repeat the past,
and when the waters have all dried up and trees are left and rotten,
when all the stars have lost their light, we will have not forgotten.

The Kid and the Soldier®

SHARON ORSBORN

He was the baby of the family with two big sisters to boot.

He had no intention of growing up; the kid was really a hoot.

One thing he really loved to do was entertain his nephews and nieces.

He'd be rowdy and goof around. And those little kids loved him to pieces.

He'd play with them and make them laugh; he was really good at that.

Wrestle and giggle and make rude sounds and chase around after the cat!

The boy who loved babies and kittens went off to fight in the war.

After that, those simple things brought pleasure to him no more.

He'd had a special way with kids that babies sensed as well.

But all of that was gone from him when he came back from hell.

Innocence was what connected them, a trait we all have at first.

But life is hard and innocence fades as we begin to see the worst.

He saw a lot in that awful war, more than he ever should have seen.

He went from being a kid to shooting at kids, with little in between.

Some things wouldn't leave him, memories ruled his every thought.

The kid remembered what the soldier did on the days that they had fought.

So the kid and angry soldier lived inside the same sad man.

The two of them were at odds; the kid needed to take a stand.

But how does a kid take back the life that the soldier stole away?

The poor kid finally figured it out and fixed it one sad day.

So the kid is no longer with us and the soldier... he's gone as well.

Both of them are in heaven for they'd already been to hell.

They had both fulfilled the missions assigned to them here on earth.

Each one of us has a purpose from the very day of our birth.

With their missions accomplished they went home on a balmy Texas night.

Brown Dwarf*

K. L. DRYK

Your stardust turns to black against the night,
and sparks then fade to nothing in its place.
A light unborn is frozen in its flight.

Your embryonic gas in gold and white
and unknown warmth can never quite replace
your stardust turned to black against the night.

A planet spins away out of your sight
and never feels the sun upon its face.
A light unborn is frozen in its flight.

The vacuum fails to hear their moaning plight,
A million lives and futures interlaced.

Your stardust turns to black against the night.

No odes composed for joy, no steel-clad knights,
no ivory pillars, no exalted race.

A light unborn is frozen in its flight.

Tomorrow broke its promise to ignite
forgotten suns alone in outer space.

Your stardust turns to black against the night.
A light unborn is frozen in its flight.

*A nebula that fails to gather enough mass to begin
nuclear fusion in its core, in essence, a stillborn star.



EL NATADOR AMY CARTER

Tears for a Son

DAVID K. SIEG



SIEGE 1

EARLY ON A FRIDAY MORNING in August 2008, we were on our way back from a two-day mission in the desert in Iraq. Forward Operating Base (FOB) Sykes was a shit hole, but it looked like paradise right about then. The radio squawked and a voice came over the air telling us to turn around and go to the Village of Um Al-Debar just outside of the city of Mahallabia. I was part of the Special Operations Forces and was supporting a Cavalry unit, so long missions and last minute orders were nothing new to me.

Just two days before Sergeant First Class (SFC) Naylor came to me and said, "You want to go have some fun in the sun?" He knew I would never say, "No." A chance to play in the sand, I was always game. Little did I know that two days later I would see something that would change my outlook on this war, and my life would never be the same.

SFC Naylor used the inner vehicle communications and told the three of us in the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) that we were being diverted on a short mission. The convoy commander First Lieutenant (Lt.) Resole, who was in another vehicle, broke in on the convoy communications and said, "And I was so looking forward to a hot meal." We all laughed. As we turned the convoy of three HMMWV's around and headed back out, just 100 feet from the gate, I saw Staff Sergeant (SSG) West waving and laughing at us from the Entry Control Point.

**THIS WAS ALL THE INFORMATION
WE HAD: TWO INSURGENTS HAD
ATTACKED THE SMALL VILLAGE,
AND THAT WAS IT.**

SIEGE 2

We had an hour drive to get there and didn't know why we were going. Always mindful of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), we had to be on our guard watching the road and roadside ahead of us. SFC Naylor finally received a message from command about our mission. This was all the information we had: two insurgents had attacked the small village, and that was it.

Unaware of what we would be driving into and with no time for a proper mission briefing, Lt. Resole gave the order to have a team of three men to assess the situation. Lt. Resole, SFC Naylor and myself were to be the three man team. The other seven soldiers were to stay with the vehicles and guide the Iraqi Army when they arrived.

When we arrived the three HUMMWV's were set for security and the assessment team exited their vehicles. As we approached the courtyard area, we saw a crowd of people gathered around what was believed to be an Iraqi Police vehicle. The vehicle had over fifty holes in it from gun fire. A small group of civilians were gathered around a body lying on the ground covered in a bloody Iraqi Police uniform. He was dead from multiple gunshot wounds.

About twenty yards away, there was another gathering of about 30 civilians. As we approached them, I could see three more bloody bodies lying on the ground. Two older women and one younger woman, all three dead from multiple gunshot wounds. I felt so sad for the bereaving relatives and friends that were all in tears. I couldn't swallow. The lump in my throat blocked my airway. It was hard not to burst out in tears. The three of us stood speechless. We had no idea the worst was yet to come. I yelled for my interpreter Josh and he came running to me. The

**IT SEEMED THIS NIGHTMARE HAD
COME TO A CLOSE.
I WAS WRONG.**

four of us were directed to go inside the village's small infirmary, so I walked up and opened the door. We walked to the back and saw a covered body and the body of a uniformed Iraqi Police officer both on tables.

SIEGE 3

Under the cover was an eleven year old female child dead from gunshot wounds. My heart sank. The Iraqi doctor covered her back up. The Iraqi Police Officer had two non-life threatening gunshot wounds and a fatal gunshot wound to the head. As it turned out, the men in uniform

were not Iraqi Police, but insurgents. The wounded driver ran into the infirmary to get help, but when the Doctor found out the uniformed man had done all of this senseless killing, the Doctor shot him in the head right on the table.

It seemed this nightmare had come to a close. I was wrong. A father busted the door open carrying a young boy's limp body. He laid the boy on the counter in front of me. The boy's eyes still open, but plainly lifeless. He was nine years old and died from two gunshot wounds to the chest. Saddened by this, I reached over with my right hand and closed his eyes. Josh looked at me and just said, "Why"? I was asking myself the same thing, but couldn't come up with a response. The insurgents claimed it a victory. Inside me, a whole new level of hatred emerged. My heart still wept for those who needlessly lost their loved ones. My hatred for those who take the lives of innocent people burned even stronger.

About five minutes later, the Iraqi Army Patrol arrived. Lt. Resole filled in the Iraqi Commander on our knowledge of the situation. We didn't know a lot, so there wasn't much to tell. I could see by the expression on the Iraqi Commander's face that he couldn't believe that the insurgents targeted unarmed civilians.

Lt. Resole, SFC Naylor, Josh and I returned to our vehicles. We decided to take a ten minute smoke break before heading back to FOB Sykes. The four of us stood there smoking and not one of us said a word. There was nothing to say.

SIEGE 4

We finished our cigarettes and climbed in our vehicles. This was to be the longest and quietest ride I have ever been on. It seemed like the trip back to the FOB would never end, as if the road just went on forever. It seemed like hours had gone by, but it had only been forty minutes.

We pulled up to the Entry Control Point. We accounted for all personnel and equipment and proceeded to the weapons cleaning area. I heard SFC Naylor mumble something. I wasn't sure what he said, but I wasn't about to ask and break the silence.

**THAT IMAGE WILL BE FOREVER
BURNED INTO MY MIND.
I JUST COULD NOT FIGURE OUT WHY
THOSE KILLINGS HAD TO HAPPEN.**

The driver of the first vehicle dropped me off at my living quarters. I changed clothes and went to take a shower. I wished I could have just washed this day away. After I was finished with my shower, I got dressed for dinner. I ordered my food and sat down to eat. I couldn't take a bite. Lt. Resole and SFC Naylor came over and sat at the table with me. SFC Naylor asked if I was okay. I told him, "No, but I will survive."

I excused myself from the table and went to call my children back in Texas. I needed to hear their voices. I needed to know they were safe. After my thirty minute call I went back to my living quarters, laid on my bed and began to cry. It didn't take long for me to fall asleep. I was exhausted from the heat, and most of all from the experiences of the day.

I woke up the next morning and hoped this whole incident was just a bad dream.

Unfortunately, it was real and I just kept seeing the image of that little Iraqi boy's face. That image will be forever burned into my mind. I just could not figure out why those killings had to happen.

SIEGE 5

What did those children ever do to deserve dieing this way? Why did they have to be there

at that moment, on that day? These are questions that I will never have answered, and they haunt me to this day.

That afternoon I found out the reason the attack took place. The reason those two insurgents attacked that quiet little village was to show the Iraqi's that the Americans can't always be there to protect them. Both of the insurgents were Iraqi Citizens. It is hard to believe they could target women and children. It is still hard to believe they could do this to their own people.

My father fought in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and would tell me stories about what he witnessed during those conflicts. He told me that I would see things that people should never see. He also told me that I may have to do things that at the time will not seem right, but in the end it will all make sense. As long as you can justify your actions, you won't lose as much sleep at night, even though, sometimes, sleep will be hard to find. I see now what he meant by the evil people can hold in their heart. Academy Award actor John Wayne made a statement in the movie, *The Green Beret*, he said, "A man carries a rifle into battle, by the grace of God he comes out in one piece and he carries a strange sense of guilt with him the rest of his life."

The men of that village stood up to the insurgents on that day. That was something that the insurgents may not have been prepared for. It was a good thing to know the Iraqi citizens were fighting back. I wished I could have done more to help them. Even today, I would go back and help out the people of Iraq if I could. Maybe some day in the future, when the country of Iraq opens up its borders, I can return as a civilian and visit "The Land Between Two Rivers."

Slabs

KEITH J. MIDGEN

As red and yellow Hop-Ons shuttle fresh tourists to faded sites, Berlin revels in the first dry day of late spring. Teenagers pose on sandbags at Checkpoint Charlie where three ersatz soldiers lounge against a grungy clapboard guardhouse watching neon graffiti escape the sooty remains of The Wall.

Slender women wearing black head-scarves steer their children's hollow hands toward the faces descending to the Kochstrasse U-Bahn platform. The orange train, packed with vacant strap-hangers glued to cell phones, empties precisely at 3:14 p.m. at the Brandenburg Tor.

Near the statue of Victoria in her thousand-year pose sits a park of concrete monoliths standing in gray files. Not one the same size, all separated by cambered alleys of dark chimney brick — looking cowed and bent like faded families wilting in line near an empty cattle car.

The sun dares to intrude among these somber slabs whose sides are speckled with glistening droplets, far too late for the looted souls with famished eyes. Deep into the array, the blocks crush the thin light tighter than a scrawled note in a crumpled envelope.

No echoes resound here along the muted lanes: Yet an old man slumps against a pillar, cupping his ears against the rhythmic scrape of synchronized shoes shuffling over splinters of shale towards the smoke. She pulls at a numbered arm and lifts him with hers.

The narrow paths slope up to meet the light where cafés line the streets outside. Traffic, laughter, fills the air, determined to smother the dreary silence clinging like fog to the rough surfaces of memory.

The world is painted once again in exuberant hues, and the living walk free in bright T-shirts and jeans.

In memory of Cora Berliner and Hannah Arendt.

Berlin Holocaust Memorial

Two Fools in a Forest

JESSICA L. LEEPER

Where have the clouds gone?
 For under tree and branch there is
 No sound of falling rain.
 No echo of thunderous night.
 Two bonnets cast shadows upon sister's eyes
 As they wade in deep through the cool stream,
 Sparkling like the golden light of crystal caves.
 One dress red, the other white,
 Wander merrily in the woods of the other side,
 Leaving sights of home far behind,
 And step into a perilous night.
 Here comes a turn, there a fallen branch,
 A tree down over mossy ground.
 One walks on, one lost in song,
 Both unaware completely.
 In the shadows of the green there
 Lives an old and withered gnome.
 Little elf, thief, and spy,
 Watch as both go strolling by
 Through his dark and forested realm.
 One girl with long black braids came walking by.
 A girl of honey hair came laughing by.
 The little elf observed them with a frown upon his face.
 'Perhaps if I show my old man's eye
 They shall swiftly turn away.'
 Thus this he did as he sprung forth,
 Swaying his arms and stating,
 "Ye'd best be on your way dear lassies,
 For you're trespassing a dangerous wood."

But lo and with unfortunate taste
 The girl in rouge merely grinned,
 "I'll bet ye who so unpleasantly lectures
 Could do very little harm to us wanderers!"
 At this reply the little man sighed
 And put his hands together.
 "Very well my dears, ignore your fears,
 But I warn ye of the Banshee's cry!
 Step further if ye will my sweets,
 Step in, do not now be shy!
 If thou art so delightedly certain
 Then give this last stretch a try.
 But do not say ye were never warned!
 Do not beg to me in your cries!"
 The girls merrily laughed and pointed and sighed,
 "What nonsense this elf-kind speaks!"
 And with foolish pride and an arrogant stride
 They fell into eternal cold sleep.
 Beyond the elf's tree barrier lay
 The great and terrible grave,
 Where many fool's bodies now lie down in pale death
 At the foot of their final regrets.
 For there shone a silver pool,
 Deeper than seas,
 Where the spirit of the cold lady dwelt,
 Her eerie cry rang loud through the night,
 Too late to turn back now.
 So when you decide to go traveling, good reader,
 Or take a long hike in the woods,
 Take heed of what the little folk say,
 For they know the land better than you ever could!



WISHING I COULD BAKE KYLE ROBERTSON

First Bite

CHARLES BROWN

Second date. He would cook.

Recipe: White Fish in a Mushroom Wine Sauce

Looked good on paper & used the familiar

Red and Gold Can of Soup

Meal Served

She took a bite and said

Delicious!

Wonderful!

Could she have the recipe?

He took a bite and wanted to

Spit it out!

Cover the plate for last rites!

Prepare oatmeal!

She copied the recipe

Prepared it once and

Threw it out.

She said it was a case of love at first bite.

**STRENGTH** AYESHAIFTIKHAR**The Spell of the Carousel**

JESSICA GONSOULIN

Like a ballerina it pirouettes,
pivotting in the center cellar of the mall—
a world, a solar system, a galaxy.
Up and down gallop the unicorns,
dragons, giraffes, tigers, and rabbits.
Cages at the zoo are vacant.
Lights flash, silver mirrors
gleam, light bulbs march around.

Crowded storefronts are reflected
in the kaleidoscope of puzzle pieces
hurled into the sky with the sound
of an orchestra of wind chimes.
The riders in the slowing race,
trapped in waltz traffic, feel
dizzy, wait for movement to end.
Real life's a dream; they're hypnotized to shop.

Interpretación de Sueños

MARCIO VELOZ MAGGIOLO

Patricio Infante despertó ese día con una tormenta en la cabeza: había soñado con los números de la lotería y debía, aún en contra de sus creencias, comprar el billete que lo convertiría en millonario. Era un hombre cristiano, profesor de secundaria y no muy dado a la ambición. Este sueño había venido a trastornarle: no sólo debía adquirir el billete, sino que no debía pagarla; sólo así el sueño se cumpliría, le había aclarado el antepasado muerto que le había visitado en sueño.

Su cabeza daba vueltas y no encontraba la forma de salir de la confusión. A media mañana había abortado la idea, pero una hora después la había retomado. Su mayor obstáculo consistía en que debía hurtar algo a un infeliz billetero, que con la venta de sus billetes apenas conseguía para comer.

Pidió consejos a su sabia esposa, y ella le recomendó:

Si robas el billete y sale, vas y le entregas el veinte por ciento al mismo hombre al que se lo cogiste, das otro veinte por ciento a nuestra iglesia, y daño resarcido.

Así lo decidió.

Durante más de cuatro horas estuvo detrás del número que debía conseguir. Pero ese billete parecía no existir. Definitivamente aliviado, decidió retornar a casa. Venía conduciendo su auto por una avenida de la ciudad cuando en un semáforo tuvo que detenerse. Un billetero se le acercó y le dijo:

Aquí está el número que anda buscando, cómprelo y esta noche será millonario.

Patricio quedó pasmado al contemplar el número: el mismo que buscaba.

Lo tomó, y en ese mismo instante el semáforo cambió; le dijo al billetero, cruce la avenida, para pagarte.

Atravesó la avenida, pero no se detuvo. Iba nervioso, con tanto temor que en varias ocasiones estuvo a punto de accidentarse.

Mientras Patricio se encaminaba hacia su casa, el billetero víctima del hurto maldecía su suerte. Sin embargo, tuvo la precaución de anotar la placa del ladrón.

Esa noche Patricio aguardaba con tensión a que iniciaran el sorteo de billetes. Había estado pegado al televisor, hasta que por fin anunciaron el número ganador. El billete 345562 había ganado el primer premio. El suyo era 225798. Pero el número 345562 le decía algo, lo remitía a algún lugar.

Efectivamente, dos días después vio en la prensa a un billetero que contaba su inverosímil historia: un hombre le había robado un billete y él, tras anotar el número de placa del auto del hombre que había huido, comprobó que era el mismo número de un billete que le quedaba. Lo retuvo por cábala. Era el número 345562.

**A translation of Marcio Veloz Maggiolo's
"Interpretación de Sueños" Interpretation of Dreams**

TAYLOR LANE

Patricio Infante awoke that day with a storm in his head: he had dreamt about lottery numbers. Even though it was against his beliefs, he was supposed to buy the ticket that would turn him into a millionaire. He was a Christian man, a high school teacher, and not much given to ambition. This dream had upset him: not only did he need to get the ticket, but he shouldn't pay for it, either; only in this way would the dream be fulfilled, as his ancestor had explained to him in the dream.

His head was spinning and he found no way to escape the confusion. By mid-morning, he had abandoned the idea, but an hour later he had taken it up once more. His major objection to the idea was that he needed to pilfer something from an unfortunate lottery vendor who could scarcely get anything to eat from the sale of his tickets.

He asked his wise wife for advice, and she recommended: "If you steal the ticket and it wins, go and give twenty percent to the same man you took it from and give another twenty percent to our church, and then the damage will be undone."

So he decided to do it her way.

He spent more than four hours searching for the number he would need to get. But that ticket seemed not to exist. Totally relieved, he decided to return home. He was driving his car down an avenue in the city when he had to stop at a traffic light. A lottery vendor drew near and told him: "Here is the number that you're looking for. Buy it, and tonight you will be a millionaire."

Patricio was stunned when he saw the number—the same one he was looking for.

He took it, and at that very moment the light changed; he told the vendor to cross the street so he could pay him.

Patricio crossed the avenue, but he did not stop. He was nervous and filled with such fear that on various occasions he almost had an accident.

While Patricio was heading home, the victim of the theft was cursing his bad luck. However, he took enough care to write down the thief's license plate.

That night Patricio was tense as he waited for the drawing to start. He had stayed glued to the television, until finally they announced the winning number. Ticket number 345562 had won first prize. His was number 225798. But the number 345562 sounded familiar to him...

it reminded him of somewhere.

Sure enough, two days later he saw a lottery ticket vendor in the newspaper who was telling an unlikely story: a man had stolen a ticket from him, and after he wrote down the fleeing man's license plate number, he realized that it was the same number of one of the tickets he hadn't sold. He had kept it out of superstition. It was number 345562.



LIVING ON THE EDGE

ELIZABETH JOHNSON

The Parking Brake is Engaged

PHILIP FULLMAN

Can you throw up devil horns listening to Journey?
You can hold up a lighter to "Open Arms,"
but can you bang your head to "Separate Ways?"
You can bang Cynthia Marie in the back
of your Chevy Cavalier
once you flip the seats down and
move them up.
You turn off the engine
leave the key in the ignition and
turn the key to ALT
so the cassette player will still work.
You tell yourself not to take everything off
in case a cop comes banging
on the window with the foot pressed against it
but your clothes still get lost on the floorboard.
She'll put a hand on your chest to make you stop
and ask by both your first and middle name
if you're trying to keep beat with the music.
It's "Don't Stop Believin'"
so it was probably pretty obvious.
What?
is both your reply and
your defense.





 **COLLIN**
COLLEGE